

Administration Releases Report on

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The Clinton administration yesterday released a grisly catalogue of Iraqi war crimes during the occupation of Kuwait, accusing Iraqi troops of systematically torturing Kuwaiti civilians by penetrating body parts with electric drills, soaking people in acid and suspending them from ceilings for beatings or dismemberment.

Much of the torture was carried out at two dozen organized "torture sites" in police stations and sports facilities in Kuwait City, according to the report. The document was completed last year by U.S. Army investigators at the behest of the State Department and provided yesterday to the United Nations Security Council.

The Bush administration had refused to declassify the document out of concern that it would damage President George Bush's reelection bid by underscoring his administration's failure to drive Iraqi President Saddam Hussein from power, according to a former senior administration official who was privy to the decision to withhold the document.

The Clinton administration, meanwhile,

has just completed a review of policy toward Iraq and has decided to keep up the pressure on Baghdad. Administration officials are eager to dispel suggestions by the new president shortly before his inauguration that he might consider a softer line toward Saddam, who clearly had been hoping for a rapprochement. Since Inauguration Day, Saddam has avoided provocations with U.S. military aircraft enforcing "no-fly zones" over northern and southern Iraq.

The general scope of atrocities committed by Iraqi forces in Kuwait has been reported widely in the media and, last year, in the Bush administration's formal "lessons learned" report on the 1991 Persian Gulf War. But the document released yesterday represents the most comprehensive U.S. government account so far, drawing on hundreds of interviews with rape and torture victims, photographic evidence and videotapes of grave sites and instruments of torture.

The report concluded that in Kuwait City alone, "a total of 1,082 Kuwaiti civilian deaths could be directly attributed to Iraqi criminal conduct. The deaths include 120 babies left to die after being removed from

incubators that were taken to Iraq, 153 children between the ages of 1 and 13 killed for various reasons and 57 mentally ill individuals killed simply because of their handicap."

In theory, the submission of the report to the Security Council could lead to convening of a formal U.N. war crimes tribunal against Iraq, but it was not clear yesterday whether the Clinton administration intends to urge that step.

"The question of an Iraqi war crimes tribunal is a matter that's under consideration at the moment," State Department spokesman Joseph Snyder said. "I've got nothing further."

Some critics of the U.S.-led war against Iraq have accused Kuwaiti citizens of exaggerating Iraqi atrocities to whip up international sympathy for their cause. During the buildup to the war, for example, an anonymous young Kuwaiti woman gave a chilling, eyewitness account of the incubator episode to the congressional Human Rights Caucus, omitting her identity as the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador to the United States. Her account has since been widely challenged.

The report released yesterday, however,

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not only found that babies were taken from incubators but concluded that human rights violations "were so widespread and methodical that they could not have occurred without the authority or knowledge of Saddam Hussein."

"The gruesome evidence confirms torture by amputation of or injury to various body parts to include limbs, eyes, tongues ears, noses, lips and genitalia," the report said. "Electric shock was applied to sensitive parts of the body (nose, mouth, genitalia); electric drills were used to penetrate chests, legs or arms. Victims were beaten until bones were broken, skulls were crushed and faces disfigured. Some victims were killed in acid baths."

The report found that "women taken hostage were raped repeatedly." In one case, the report said, "eyewitnesses reported Iraqis torturing a woman by making her eat her own flesh as it was cut from her body. Other eyewitness accounts described Iraqi execution of Kuwaiti civilians by dismemberment and beating while victims were suspended from ceilings and with implements such as axes. The accounts also described psychological terror inflicted by mock executions."

The report was compiled by two teams of military lawyers specializing in international law. The teams were drawn from two Army Reserve detachments—the 199th Judge Advocate Detachment in St. Petersburg, Fla., and the 208th Judge Advocate Detachment in the District.

Although completed in January 1992, the report was never released by the Bush administration for political reasons. "Some people were concerned that if we released it during the campaign, people would say, 'Why don't you bring this guy to justice?'" said the former administration official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"The concern was, this may get attention and could prove to be embarrassing and lead to additional questions," the former official said. As a consequence, he said, the Pentagon gave the document to the Justice Department for evaluation and as a "way to get additional time."

Other war crimes cited in the document included mistreatment of prisoners of war, the use of U.S. civilian hostages to protect critical government installations, Scud missile attacks against civilian targets in Saudi Arabia and Israel and the deliberate release of oil into the Persian Gulf.